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ABSTRACT

In a study designed to document empirically perceptions about women managers' communication skills and training needs, 101 managers (53 females and 48 males) responded to two open-ended questions: (1) From your observation and experience, what specific communication skills do women possess that might help promote their managerial effectiveness? and (2) From your observations and experience, in what specific communication skills should women receive training to help promote their managerial effectiveness? Answers showed that both male and female managers perceived that women possess three communicaton skills necessary for effective management: listening, verbal/writing skills, and nonverbal communication skills. In addition, both males and females perceived four areas in which women managers need training: assertiveness, confidence building, public speaking/making presentations, and dealing with males. An examination of the total number of items supplied by male and female respondents to each research question revealed that females had more detailed perceptions about women managers' communication skills and training needs than did males. These data suggest two possibilities: either male managers perceived female managers to have fewer communication skills and training needs than the females perceived for themselves, or male managers had not given as much thought to the questions. (FL)

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PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S COMMUNICATION SKILLS RELATED TO MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS

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PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S COMMUNICATION SKILLS
RELATED TO MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS

Literature review

In the social and behavioral sciences, there exists a growing literature related to women in management. Perhaps this burgeoning research is because more women than ever before are assuming managerial positions (Matteson, 1976). Such research has examined women's organizational position relative to selection, monetary remuneration, promotion, utilization, and development (Terborg,Peters, Ilgen, & Smith, 1977).

Studies of attitudes toward women as managers reveal, among other things, the perception that males are better suited and more capable than females for management positions. Bowman, Worthy, & Greyson (1965) found that managers do not perceive women as possessing the skills in decision-making or competitive aggressiveness required for successful business executives. Women have been perceived as too emotional for managerial positions (Bowman, et al., 1965; Orth & Jacobs, 1971; Schein, 1973). Rosen and Jerdee (1974) found a bias against women in management promotion and development. Terborg and Ilgen (1975) explain that commonly held sex-role attitudes perpetuate the belief that males are more independent, objective, competitive, and better suited to handle management responsibilities than are women. Women are stereotyped as more gentle, sensitive, passive, and less suited to such responsible positions in business.

Essentially, there seems to exist a stereotype of specific traits which are believed to be necessary for administrative success and women are seen as not possessing these traits.

The gender-typical behaviors which females have been socialized to develop may, in fact, be incompatible with traditional organizational definitions of managerial effectiveness. It has been suggested that traditional organizational norms derive from military and sports models (Shepard, 1977; Harragan, 1977). It is in the military and sports arenas that women have been denied access to important learnings and men have acquired the mentality and skills needed in large organizations: competitiveness, aggressiveness, the ability to strategize, an understanding of the superior/subordinate relationship, etc.

Yet, contemporary organizational norms of the American workplace may be undergoing change. It has been suggested that the workplace of the future will combine norms of competitiveness with cooperativeness, aggressiveness with supportiveness, rationality with emotionality, discipline with compassion, and impersonality with empathy. Shepard (1977) claims that successful management already means using behavioral flexibility--combining skills that males have typically demonstrated with skills that females have typically demonstrated so that an organization can use the multifaceted potentials of all its members. Bunker and Seashore (1977) indicate that men and women have a great deal to offer each other in the molding of new work climates.

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether current perceptions acknowledge the possibility that women may already possess communication skills related to managerial effectiveness and to survey perceptions about the communication training needs of women as managers. Specifically, this study asks the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. From your observation and experience, what specific communication skills do women possess which might help promote their managerial effectiveness?

2. From your observation and experience, in what specific communication skills should women receive training to help promote their managerial effectiveness?

Method

One-hundred and one managers (53 females and 48 males) provided open-ended responses on the two research questions. One-third of the sample consisted of managerial-level city and regional planners; one-third were managers from various functions within a private hospital; the final third consisted of managers from a military and consumer electronics manufacturing company. All respondents were drawn from two large metropolitan areas within the Midwest. Respondents received a one-page form upon which they answered the two research questions and then indicated their own gender.

Data Analysis

Responses from each third of the sample were compared and then collapsed into one sample because of homogeneity of answers. That is, each portion of the sample gave similar responses. Then, a frequency tabulation of all responses for each question across 101 respondents was completed.

Results

The responses to the first research question are listed in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 Here

Both male and female managers in this study perceive three communication skills that women possess relative to effective management:

1. Listening (reported by 21% of respondents)
2. Verbal/writing skills (reported by 13% of respondents)
3. Nonverbal communication skills (reported by 11% of respondents)

Listening was mentioned three times as often by female respondents (30%) than by male respondents (10%). Verbal/writing skills were mentioned more than twice as often by male respondents (19%) than by female respondents (8%). Nonverbal communication as a female skill contributing to effective management was mentioned by 13% of the female respondents and 8% of the male respondents.

The male respondents mentioned three communication skills not listed by the female respondents: attention to detail (8%); voice

quality (8%); and keeping listeners' attention (6%). Female respondents perceived eleven skills of women managers not listed by male respondents: empathy/understanding/sympathy (28%); giving and accepting feedback (19%); open/receptinve/responsive to others (13%); organized (13%); relating to others (9%); sensitivity (9%); honesty/sincerity (9%); flexibility (9%); showing equality/humanness (6%); putting others at ease (6%); personable (6%).

The responses to the second research question are listed in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 here

Both male and female managers in this study perceive four communication skills on which women managers need training:

1. Assertiveness (reported by 33% of respondents)
2. Confidence-building (reported by 20% of respondents)
3. Public speaking/making presentations (reported by 17% of respondents)
4. Dealing with males (reported by 11% of respondents)

Assertiveness was mentioned almost twice as often by female respondents (40%) than by male respondents (21%). Women managers' need to build confidence was listed by 32% of the females in the sample but by only 6% of the males in the sample. Training in public speaking/making presentations was noted by 25% of the females and only 8% of the males. Fifteen percent of the females felt that women managers need training in dealing with males while 6% of the males listed this same training need.

Male respondents listed three training needs of women managers which were not listed by female respondents: avoiding a superior attitude (10%); verbal/writing training (8%); and avoiding talking too much (6%). Female respondents noted four training needs of women managers which were not listed by male respondents: enhancing credibility/authority (17%); developing a professional attitude and appearance (11%); controlling emotions (9%): and enhancing voice quality (8%).

Discussion

In examining the total number of items supplied by male and female respondents on each research question, it is clear that females have more detailed perceptions about women managers' communication skills and training needs. On question 1, the sample of 53 females listed a total of 97 items concerning communication skills possessed by women relative to effective management. The 48 male respondents listed a total of only 29 items concerning communication skills that women have relative to effective management. Likewise on question 2, female respondents noted a total of 83 items concerning communication training needs of women managers, while male respondents listed a total of 34 items concerning communication training needs of women managers. These data indicate two possibilities: Either male managers perceive female managers to have fewer communication skills and training needs than the women perceive for themselves; Or male managers have not given as much thought as female managers have to the questions. It is not surprising that women managers have a more crystallized view of their own gender's communication

skills and training needs. One would suspect that women managers often contemplate these questions that impinge on their day-to-day functioning and career advancement. Women managers naturally are in a better position to elaborate on their own communication strengths and weaknesses. One would hope then that training directors solicit opinions from female managers before scheduling in-house training programs or selecting public training seminars for developing communication skills of women in management.

These results also show some consistency in males' and females' perceptions of the communication skills of women managers. Of the 126 items listed for research question 1, 45 of those items were noted by males and females alike. In other words, there was a 36% overlap between male and female respondents to the question of communication skills of women managers.

There was more consistency of opinion, however, on research question 2. Of the 117 items listed as communication training needs of women managers, 81 of those items were noted by males and females alike. That indicates a 69% overlap in males' and females' perceptions of the communication training needs of women in management.

Such consistency of reaction between males and females in this study is encouraging for it shows the extent of unified perceptions between male and female managers. Rather than indicating discrepant views of women managers, male and female managers in this study showed some consistency in their opinions regarding women's communication skills and even more consensus in their assessment of the training needs of women managers. It seems that managers, be they male or female, do agree, to some extent, on the communicative elements of

effective management.

This is not to say that male and female respondents provided totally consistent perceptions. In examining the different opinions of male and female respondents on question 1, we see eleven communication skills (representing 55% of total items listed) indicated by the females that were not mentioned by the males and three skills listed solely by the males (representing 9% of total items listed). In examining the different opinions of male and female respondents on question 2, we see three communication training needs (representing 10% of total items listed) reported exclusively by the males and four communication training needs (representing 20% of total items listed) stated exclusively by the females.

This indicates that male and female managers differ more in their perceptions of women managers' communication skills than they do in their perceptions of women managers' training needs. Perhaps male and female managers ought to discuss with each other their differing perceptions of women managers' communication skills. Management, which traditionally has been male-oriented, might profit from examining the communication skills which women managers bring to organizations. Likewise, those women already in management can help create androgynous or behaviorally felxible management practices by emphasizing or vocalizing their unique communication skills.

When observing the types of communication skills and training needs listed by respondents, we see reactions which corroborate previous studies of women in management. For the most part, results depict an image of women managers as interpersonally competent, i.e.,

good listeners, verbally skilled, nonberbally astute, empathic, receptive, sensitive, honest, flexible, and personable. It is not surprising to learn that managers believe women managers need training in assertiveness, confidence-building, public speaking, enhancing credibility and authority, professionalism, and controlling emotions. These are topics which we might expect to find in training programs for women managers. These are traditionally masculine behaviors which women managers must learn if they are to succeed in the male-oriented management sphere.

With the influx of women into management, though, we wonder if accepted management practices will continue to revolve around traditional male behaviors without encompassing as well traditional female behaviors such as sensitivity, empathy, and responsiveness. If organizations are to achieve more contemporary and flexible work climates as Shepard (1977) and Bunker and Seashore (1977) propose, training in androgynous management techniques needs to be accelerated. Just as women managers need training in among other things, assertiveness, confidence-building, enhancing credibility, and controlling emotions, male managers will need training in among other things, listening, verbal skills, nonverbal communication, empathy, and sensitivity.

This study represents the initial attempt to empirically document perceptions about women managers' communication skills and training needs. Additional data should be collected on these items. The open-ended questions used in this study can provide only tentative reactions. This preliminary data could be used to formulate a Likert-type scale administered to a larger sample with factor

analysis of results. Such a program of research will show dimensions of communication on which women managers have strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, future research should investigate perceptions of male managers' communication skills and training needs. Then a comparison could be made of perceptions of communication styles of both men and women in management. By surveying, with valid measuring instruments, large numbers of male and female managers about communication skills and training needs of both men and women in management, we can create a profile of effective, contemporary management practices. Only then will organizations be able to gain maximum productivity through capitalizing on the skills of both male and female managers.

Table 1

"From your observation and experience, what specific communication skills do women in general possess which might help them be effective managers?"

SKILL	MALES N = 48		FEMALES N = 53		TOTAL N = 101	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Listening*	5	10	16	30	21	21
verbal/writing*	9	19	4	8	13	13
nonverbal communication*	4	8	7	13	11	11
attention to detail	4	8			4	4
voice quality	4	8			4	4
keep listeners' attention	3	6			3	3
empathy/understanding/sympathy			15	28	15	15
giving and accepting feedback			10	19	10	10
open/receptive/responsive to others			7	13	7	7
organized			7	13	7	7
relating to others			6	9	6	6
sensitivity			6	9	6	6
honesty/sincerity			5	9	5	5
flexibility			5	9	5	5
showing equality/humanness			3	6	3	3
putting others at ease			3	6	3	3
personable			3	6	3	3
	29		97		126	

* listed by both male and female respondents

Table 2

"From your observation and experience, in what specific communication skills should women managers receive training to help them become more effective managers?"

TRAINING NEEDS	MALES N = 48		FEMALES N = 53		TOTAL N = 101	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
assertiveness*	12	21	21	40	33	33
confidence-building*	3	6	17	32	20	20
public speaking/making presentations*	4	8	13	25	17	17
dealing with males*	3	6	8	15	11	11
avciding a superior attitude	5	10			5	5
verbal/writing	4	8			4	4
avoiding talking too much	3	6			3	3
credibility/authority			9	17	9	9
professionalism in attitude and appearance			6	11	6	6
controlling emotions			5	9	5	5
voice quality			4	8	4	4
	34		33		117	

* listed by both male and female respondents

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